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TAGS: MARR PREL FJ

SUBJECT: FIJI MILITARY GOES OFF THE WALL RE NEWS ARTICLE

REF: SUVA 393

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

RFMF calls article "blatant lie," swats at Ambassador

11. (U) This follows up on reftel regarding a Fiji Sun article on Sept. 25 that alleged the U.S., during the recent Pacific Armies Management Seminar (PAMS) in Fiji, encouraged Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) Commander Bainimarama to meddle in domestic politics. Per reftel, we responded to reaffirm the USG view of proper civil-military relations. Late on Sept. 26, the RFMF spokesman issued a press release stating that the Sun article's references to LtGen. Brown, Commander USARPAC, were "a blatant lie." The release went on to chastise Ambassador Dinger for commenting publicly rather than "finding out the truth" from the RFMF. The release suggested the Ambassador's comments will put a strain on the relationship between the RFMF and the U.S. Army, and it proposed that the Ambassador apologize to both. We understand that Commodore Bainimarama, now overseas, has also been e-mailing media contacts, spinning out a surreal version of events that at least one website has carried.

Embassy response was carefully tailored

12. (C) For now, the Embassy has decided not to engage further in public. The media statement relayed in reftel was necessary to correct the Sun article's false allegations that endangered U.S. interests in Fiji: the suggestions that the USG recently encouraged Bainimarama to reengage in domestic politics. The Embassy statement was deliberately confined to those corrections. When a reporter asked, the Ambassador declined to characterize Bainimarama's alleged statements in a speech last Saturday or in the Sun article. At the time, the Ambassador noted he was not directly privy to what the Commodore had said, and when the Embassy had sought clarification from senior levels of the RFMF they couldn't offer a response.

Time heals; Fiji VP and PM happy

13. (C) All this will eventually fade, and we will continue to accent to the Fiji Government and the RFMF our enthusiasm for working with Fiji on mutual PKO interests. In the meantime, Fiji's civilian leadership has been very complimentary. Vice President Madraiwiwi and Prime Minister Qarase both expressed appreciation to the Ambassador for issuing a carefully worded and much needed statement.

Judicial review of RFMF role in the works

14. (C) The VP told us he informed Acting RFMF Commander Teleni earlier this week that he, the VP, intends to

recommend to President Iloilo to forward to Fiji's Supreme Court a request from PM Qarase for a definitive judicial opinion on what the RFMF's roles are under the 1997 Constitution. The VP noted that Bainimarama's outburst last weekend illustrated the importance of settling the issue. As we noted in reftel, the prospect of that judicial process could well be what triggered Bainimarama in the first place.

DINGER